DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 702 FL 025 010

AUTHOR	Books, Marilyn
TITLE	In-Depth Interviewing as Qualitative Investigation.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	11p.; In: Classroom Teachers and Classroom Research; see FL 024 999.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Research; Classroom Techniques; Comparative Analysis; *Data Collection; *Data Interpretation; Foreign Countries; *Interviews; *Qualitative Research; *Questioning Techniques; *Research Methodology; Sampling; Second Language Instruction; Second Languages; Social Behavior; Sociocultural Patterns; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Americans (United States); *Japan; Japanese People

ABSTRACT

A discussion of in-depth interviewing as a method for research on language teaching and learning situates the technique within the continuum of research methodology and differentiates it from quantitative research methods. The strengths and weaknesses of in-depth interviewing are examined, methods of sampling are discussed, and advice on the administration of interviews is provided. Examples are offered from a study of the positive and negative experiences of North American native English speakers and native Japanese speakers who teach English at Japanese universities in relation to key communication styles: Americans' assertiveness, explicitness, and independence, and Japanese indirectness, "nemawashi" (groundwork), and "tatemae" (stated position). It is concluded that the compelling strengths of inductive, intensive, individual, and insightful interviews will propel them to greater popularity and a lighter status in education and other social science fields in the 21st century. (Contains 12 references.) (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gene Hall
Trowler
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Chapter 11

ED 415 702

In-Depth Interviewing as Qualitative Investigation

Marilyn Books

Waseda University

> Interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is; an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed door there is a world of secrets (Oakley, 1986, p. 231).

Social behavior is complex and multidetermined, and there is no perfect method for studying it. Of the variety of methodological approaches, this paper presents in-depth interviewing as a strategy in qualitative research for discovering the secrets of the complex human psyche. Krathwohl (1993, xvii) affirmed that most research texts:

> hew to a positivistic point of view, stressing experimentation and ignoring or minimizing qualitative research . . . . It is clear that we have entered an era where more than the positivistic paradigm is considered defensible.

FL 025 010

What determines the use of a qualitative method such as in-depth interviewing? the purpose of the study does. If the question is, "How does the degree of adoption of the American custom of explicitness correlate with the length of overseas experience?" then a survey may be the best choice. If the scholar is wondering, "How do Japanese professors speak with their American cohorts in staff meetings?" then participant observation would be a likely technique. If the objective is to determine whether Japanese language lessons hasten the acculturation of foreigners, then an experimental method may suit best; however, if the purpose is to

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

comprehend the meaning of people's existence ("What is it like talking to a Japanese person who is speaking indirectly? What is your experience with that/them?") then open-ended oral questioning is a useful avenue of study.

This paper begins by looking at the nature of in-depth interviewing, situating it on the continuum of research methodology, and differentiating it from quantitative research. It then discusses the strengths and weaknesses of open-ended surveying. Sampling to determine interviewees will be discussed in the next section. Finally, some advice on the actual administration of the interview is offered.

The Sample Study

The sample study discussed in this paper was originally the basis of a doctoral dissertation in communication (Books, 1996). The topical question was: "What are the positive and negative experiences of North American native English speakers and native Japanese speakers who teach English at Japanese universities in relation to these key communication styles: Americans' assertiveness, explicitness, and independence; and Japanese indirectness, *nemawashi* (groundwork), and *tatemae* (stated position)?"

Research Methods

Research methods fall along a continuum between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methodologies generally use numeric data to portray phenomenon, seek to validate hypotheses, preplan with variables and concrete notions about how to explain occurrences, maintain controls (sometimes extensive), employ structures (often highly constrictive), and are often controlled in a laboratory setting.

Qualitative methods usually employ verbal data, begin with few or no preconceived notions, seek to comprehend and explain or describe phenomena, maintain little or no control and structure, explore with the aim of discovering what exists that is of importance in the situation, engage in a more natural function, and are carried out in natural environments.

Some methods span the continuum and can be, depending on the situation, either quantitative or qualitative. Methods which are generally quantitative and stress validation are: experimentation (complete with dependent and independent variables), and model building and testing (using relationships as predictors). Further away from the quantitative pole are: meta-analysis (studying similar studies) and longitudinal studies (long-term studies of groups). Those which typically lean more to description and rely at least somewhat on explanation are: single-subject studies (long-term studies of individuals), evaluation methods (determining efficacy), historical methods (examining personal and institutional documents), surveys (usually closed questionnaires), and classification

schemes (placing material into useful categories). Theory building (exceeding actual data) is mostly description and explanation.

At the other end of the continuum is qualitative research. It must be noted that action research is not really a method, but a useful approach for using any of the available research methods, and such studies are carried out in tandem with the benefactor, for example, the educator who can use the results. A more thorough discussion of the variety of research methods can be found in Krathwohl (1993).

Subsumed under qualitative research are these fundamental strategies: observation, participant observation, document reviews, and interviews. Observation involves noting and recording behaviors, events, and objects in the setting studied. Participant observation immerses the researcher in the setting and experiences of those observed. Included in document reviewing is the perusal of archival data.

Patton (1990) noted that interviews vary in the determination and standardization of questions *before* the interview. He divided open-ended interviews into three categories: the informal conversational interview, the standardized open-ended interview, and the general interview guide approach. The conversational style entails a spontaneous flow of questions. The standardized interview employs a specific list of questions to be asked sequentially. The general interview uses an outline of issues, but the order of presentation may vary and the actual wording is not standardized. It is free-flowing and is regarded as "a speech event" in the words of Mishler (1986, p. 35). That was the style chosen for the study referred to in this work. For example, the American participants were shown a chart with the headings Postives and Negatives; and the terms "indirectness," "*nemawashi* (groundwork)," and "*tatemae* (stated position)." They were then asked, "What are your positive experiences with Japanese indirectness?" or "What are the good points related to the indirectness of your counterparts?" or a similarly worded question.

Differentiating Quantitative and Qualitative Research

I will now compare in-depth interviewing specifically with quantitative research in general.

Apart from a different emphasis on numbers and words, the greatest contrast between quantitative and qualitative investigation is the amount of control the investigator has over the research. In qualitative interviews, interviewees frequently take the topic and develop it, providing new direction and allowing the interview to change course and the interviewer to explore unexpected topics.

Quantitative methods begin with a hypothesis and use a deductive process, whereas interviews gather data and inductively process it to an explanation. Instead of validating an explanation, interviews develop an explanation, often uncovering unexpected results. In the sample study, for instance, the Japanese participants' opinions on American assertiveness were not what the interviewer had expected when the investigation was begun.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Another function of the interview is to reveal a relationship between the differing views of the interviewee and the interviewer (Krathwohl, 1993). As the interviewer in the sample study, I felt the speech strategy of explicitness to be preferable to ambiguity because it fosters comprehension of the speaker's stand. However, it would have defeated the purpose of the interview to argue with the Japanese interviewees who reacted negatively to explicitness:

- "If they [Americans] give too much background information that's boring and insulting—when they confront you with an issue and use a lot of words to be very definite and you know all about it. But it's a habit of Americans."
- "For you the verbal code is supreme; you want everything in writing, like your teaching contract. It's almost as if you can't trust anyone."
- "I find him patronizing and boorish but I guess you find him eloquent."

Unlike quantitative research, in qualitative research most of the creative work—coding and analyzing the revelations into useful slots and assigning meaning to them—follows the data collection.

The objectives of positivistic research and interview research are diametrically opposed to each other. The former deals with validation, while the latter—employing questions like, "Do you like or dislike the assertiveness of Americans? Can you describe your experience with that?"—has basically two goals: description and explanation. In the social sciences in particular, the goal of research is seen as exploring for "the development of explanatory concepts that help you understand individual behavior and social processes, concepts that help make life intelligible" (Jones, 1996, p. 7). To explain a preferred or abhorred communication style is to give a reason for it—why people feel the way they do. In the sample study, reasons were articulated by a middle-aged female Japanese instructor who had lived and taught in Yarmouth, Maine for six years as she explained why she had come to accept assertiveness as positive.

> Well, I've never seen or met an American professor who is not assertive. I like it very much; I mean it's very productive. I don't have to guess to get their point. They come out with a point; then I can be assertive myself, right? Assertive persons usually permit the other person to be assertive, too, and I enjoy the interaction.

A communication scholar who studied in the US for several years and deals with Americans often in his professional associations clarified:

> They assert their own opinion, I think, rather than evading the issue and I appreciate that fact. I take it positively. At a conference, I'd read a paper and one of the Americans came to me after the presentation and told me that he didn't agree. You know, we had a very fruitful exchange of opinions and afterwards we became friends. That's very difficult among Japanese. That was a positive experi-

ence. And during the speech Americans challenged me. Sometimes that shows a reaction to what I'm talking about and I enjoy it. It shows someone's listening to me, not sleeping.

The Strengths of In-depth Interviewing

Perhaps one of the most advantageous aspects of interviews is the fact that they are particularly successful in obtaining large amounts of data in relatively short periods of time.

Open-ended interviewing is typically as close to a natural process as possible. There is more freedom in the type of questions, in the wording of the questions, and in the choice of setting all of which adds to the naturalness. This in turn facilitates cooperation.

In addition, the range of data is unlimited. Experiments begin with a hypothesis and seek to verify it whereas in-depth interviewers are not so restricted. This allows the researcher to explore and discover the topic jointly with the interviewees because of the unstructured way in which the participants express their own thoughts, with a reduced likelihood of missing new and unreported details or concepts. In the sample study, for example, discoveries emerged from the data as I listened to Japanese opinions on American assertiveness:

- "They have warmth because they come up to me and tell me what they think. I like that."
- "I see they go right up to some other Japanese teachers and state their case. They exude confidence. It's fine, I think. . . ."
- "It sure beats the antithesis, being self-effacing, which is what my colleagues [Japanese] try to do. That's [the habit of] a lot of Japanese, and that's not good."

These were not explanations I had thought of when I entered the inquiry. The wholehearted acceptance and preference of assertiveness was contrary to my expectations.

Because the study focused on lengthy individual participation, I was able to better grasp the complexity and background of the individual's experience. This was aided by face-to-face contact in which non-verbal behavior could be observed and noted. Moreover, the peculiar format of interviewing allowed immediate follow-up questioning for expansion, omissions, clarification, and contextualization. These latter features point to how interviewers affect the interview positively: even if unintentionally they give feedback via body language or prompts, encouraging more complete responses.

Rich verbal descriptions which portray phenomena are characteristic as in these responses to the concept of *nemawashi* (groundwork):

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> Well, at least *nemawashi* saves the struggle. In Japan there's no struggle; it's smo-o-o-oth. If there were any arguing, it's done privately. Back home they argue vociferously in public, at the meetings, and I used to like the challenge of the confrontation. There's always two camps, the proponents and the opponents. We have a vote and the winners savor the victory, but the losers cause a disagreeable gap and grudgingly wait and plan viciously for the next vote. In Japan that dissension is avoided. I'm turning Japanese. [He laughed.]
>
> I think *nemawashi* worked, for example, when my visa problems were sorted out. All six of the foreigners consulted each other on my behalf and then we got together and went *en masse* to the department head who in turn went to the personnel in charge of external affairs, who went to his superior, etc. It went all the way up and was then implemented *toute de suite*.

Readers of the published results also frequently identify with the quotations which have intuitive appeal for them.

The Weaknesses of In-depth Interviewing

The gravest weakness of interviewing is the amount of time it takes, not just for the interviewing itself, but also for setting up appointments, commuting to meet the participants, transcribing the tape recordings, and analyzing the data.

Since a one hour recording can take a typist from two to four hours (depending on the accent, grammar, articulation, rate of speech production, and so on) to type, all data in the sample study was transcribed by hired transcriptionists. Additionally, managing the mountains of material typed up presented huge problems. If a response comes at an average rate of 150 words a minute, a one-hour cassette can yield 9,000 words, or 36 pages of text (at 250 words per page). It can be an overwhelming task to sift through, dissect, code, and analyze.

The presence of the recording mechanism can be a deterrent to free speech. In this research example it was not, given the cooperativeness of the participants and the frankness of their statements, for example:

- "So you thought we are all dumb Japanese?"
- "They illiterate [*sic*], on and on and on like a drunkard."
- "You maybe look and act like *ronin* (leaderless samurai).

Another weakness is that errors of commission can occur on the part of the interviewee and the interviewer. There is no assurance that what is related by an interviewee is accurate. The interviewee may also be uncomfortable or fearful and therefore unable or unwilling to speak frankly, and there is no guarantee that the interviewer will not (knowingly or unknowingly) influence the responses.

Errors of omission can also occur. People are commonly unaware of—or unable to verbalize—circumstances in their lives, or may withhold incriminating

evidence. Failure on the part of the interviewer to question some participants in a way that is meaningful to them may also yield parsimonious replies. The role of interviewer demands well developed listening skills and interpersonal communication skills which, if not present, can easily and seriously weaken the quality of data collected.

Analyzing the data presents a whole set of pitfalls. Only two are cited here: (a) How do you explain unanticipated results?, and (b) Verbal data, even more than statistics, is open to various interpretations.

Sampling of Interviewees

> It is always nice to find a way of doing things that will save you time and energy, provided that you do not sacrifice quality in the process. . . . Sampling is just such a time and energy saver. Furthermore, when done properly, it not only does not sacrifice quality, but may actually improve the quality of the data obtained (Jones, 1996, p. 180).

For in-depth interviewing, the interviewer could choose a true representative sample (such as a random, stratified, or systematic sample) of the population of interest as if quantitative research were to be carried out, or vary that by engaging in non-probability sampling such as in the judgmental and purposive format.

For the communication style investigation carried out in the sample study, the "purposive" sampling format was chosen. It is also called "judgmental," "deliberate," or "selective" because the researcher uses judgment in selecting individuals who will be instrumental in gathering data (Lonner & Berry, 1986, p. 87). Patton also uses the term "purposeful," and offers the rationalization that by selecting cases for study in depth, "the logic and power" is revealed: one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study, thus the term "purposeful sampling." He contrasted quantitative and qualitative investigation on the basis of sample size and method:

> Perhaps nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly (1990, p. 169).

For the sample study, the purposive method was chosen instead of random sampling to increase the depth of data exposed and to illuminate the questions under study. In addition, "random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases . . . as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities [may be] uncovered" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). An even greater danger of random sampling, however, is the opposite situation, namely, a profusion of extreme cases.

Purposive sampling involves choosing just those elements (each individual in the population is considered an element, or a unit of analysis) you want to interview without regard to generalizability. The selection of participants could be guided (as it was in the cited work) by the premise that the knowledge of self and the ability to communicate provides a rich base of data and has priority over the representativeness of the entire sample. That means that the investigator could plan not to work with great numbers of deviants, that is, the polar cases which would skew the results, provide less than useful material, or not be applicable to the population who would value the results of your study. In effect, purposive sampling can lead to a better representation of the intended consumer.

The strategy in the sample research was the following:

1. I devised a sample frame (a tentative list) of all possible types of candidates from amongst North American native English speakers and native Japanese speakers who teach English at Japanese universities. The scope was delimited to "nativeness," nationality, subject taught and occupation, institution, level of institution, and geographical location: native speakers from Japan and North America teaching English as professors at Japanese colleges and universities in Tokyo.

2. From a basic sample, I reserved a list of aberrant entries such as young, new arrivals, potentially lacking in self-awareness who are often at the "Honeymoon Stage" of the culture shock curve (loving every novel aspect about Japan); very old professors, particularly those about to retire; and those who claimed to be totally bilingual and bicultural. Interviewees had to meet certain other specifications. One general specification was that Japanese subjects had to speak English well enough to discuss abstract topics in depth.

3. In addition, I wanted the sample to take into account the disproportionate number of males hired in Japanese universities. I wanted to make sure that females were included in appropriate numbers corresponding to their presence. I treated each gender as a separate population, and took the same percentage from each, thereby including more males than females.

4. I sought a mix of participants who I knew well and those who were strangers. I felt that friends and acquaintances would provide context, facilitating analysis; while those with whom I had not yet established a rapport might be less hesitant to provide stronger statements and more divergent positions (this proved true).

5. After interviewing my core sample and formulating some generalizations, I tested the robustness of those generalizations via triangulation. I resurrected the aberrant list and selected subjects who might contradict my findings.

Only a small portion of the number of potential candidates were chosen. The sample group consisted of 25 individuals of each racial group, totalling 50 interviewees.

Administrative Techniques

Both science and art are involved in the interview itself. The participant's motivation, the manner of the researcher, and the setting are amongst the most crucial features affecting the quality and validity of the data received, and there is much that the interviewer can do to improve them.

The participant can be motivated by skillful prompting. Utterances such as "And?" and "Then?" and "Mm" can aid the process. Non-verbal communication can be employed like nodding, gestures of encouragement, and moving in your seat as if to get a better (ear) vantage point. Exploring laughter and tolerating silence are among the many good hints provided by Seidman (1991). Douglas stated that:

> In general, the more of a listener the interviewer is, the more sensitive, the more openly intimate, the more sincerely interested in and warmly caring about the other person, the more he can temporarily surrender to the experience and soul of the other person, the more successful he will be as a creative interviewer (1985, p. 57).

It seems obvious that the interviewer should be a good listener, but too often the researcher fails to take in the interviewee's points. This becomes clear when the tapes are played back and missed opportunities to clarify stances or to prod the speaker are noticed. Interviewers should be masters at forgetting their frames of reference, attending to the interviewees, coming to the meeting prepared to be surprised and to learn something entirely new, and entering the interview anxious to have their preconceived notions overturned. The axiom of Heraclitis applies, "If you expect not the unexpected, you shall not find truth." One of the most important attitudes for the interviewer to adopt is that the interviewee's contributions are valuable and useful.

Even with the guide type of interview, hypothetical examples have to be prepared to elucidate concepts which may not be understood. In the sample study, for example, examples of *tatemae* (stated position) were provided when necessary, in the cases where informants were unfamiliar with the term, or when contrasts were made.

As the interviewer will not know many of the interviewees, it is probably best to let the participants choose the setting, with the prompt that "situational encapsulation" (Douglas, 1985, p. 99) is important to avoid interruptions and to foster reflection. Douglas also counseled that, "the recorder is both a reassurance of the seriousness of your pursuit and a brutal technological reminder of the human separateness that undermines the intimate communion you are trying to create" (1985, p. 83). In the sample study, a recorder was used in each interview and was found to be indispensable. More speaker autonomy can be attained if the interviewees are in charge of the pause button allowing them to choose which statements are recorded.

There are certain research variables which must be controlled in both quantitative and qualitative investigation. Brown's quantitative work (1988, pp. 33-35) mentions a few. The halo effect is "the tendency among human beings to respond positively to a person they like"(Brown, 1988, p. 33). Subject expectancy and researcher expectancy figure in both. The reactivity effect is exemplified by the situation in which the "subjects actually form or solidify attitudes that they did not have before [the research]" (Brown, 1988, p. 35).

Other useful guidelines are offered by Frey and Oishi (1995) on logistics (availability of resources such as facilities) and data quality (e.g., confidentiality).

Conclusion

The underlying cultural or social motivations for a behavior, communicative or otherwise, are central and complex, and that is what makes investigation of human behavior both difficult and exciting. Which method to pursue is the challenge. There is no perfect method.

Qualitative methodology—in particular interviews—have been overlooked for too long. The compelling strengths of inductive, intensive, individual, insightful interviews will propel them to greater popularity and a higher status in education and other social science fields in the twenty-first century as they make valuable contributions in uncovering "the world of secrets" out there.

References

Books, M. (1996). *Communication styles of Japanese and Americans: Six key styles explored*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms Inc. (University Microfilms No. 95–42, 658.)

Brown, J. D. (1988). *Understanding research in second language learning: A teacher's guide to statistics and research design*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, J. D. (1985). *Creative interviewing*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Frey, J. H., & Oishi, S. M. (1995). *How to conduct interviews by telephone and in person*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Jones, R. A. (1996). *Research methods in the social and behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates.

Krathwohl, D. R. (1993). *Methods of educational and social science research: An integrated approach*. New York: Longman.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Lonner, W. J., & Berry, J. W. (1986). Sampling and surveying. In W. J. Lonner & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Field methods in cross-cultural research* (pp. 85–110). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oakley, A. (1986). Interviewing women: A contradiction of terms? In A. Oakley (Ed.), *Telling the truth about Jerusalem* (pp. 231–251). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.

Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Columbia University.